Plumbing Ethically:

A New Pastorate in Ian McEwan's *Saturday*

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Ian McEwan's post-9/11 novel *Saturday* (2005) has divided reviewers and critics mainly due to its exclusive focus on the complacent elite protagonist, Henry Perowne, who can be described as a Blairite neoliberal, and its use of Matthew Arnold's 'Dover Beach' (1867) as a *deus ex machina*. Interestingly, Perowne's complacency endorses Foucauldian 'pastoral power', now in the hands of medical professionals, which bears a close parallel to the godlike power of a novelist, a theme explored in *Atonement* (2001). Indeed, McEwan's neurosurgeon exercises a form of control over the populace: on the one hand, he guides his patients to live a *normal* life by removing abnormalities and getting everything in the *right* order; on the other, he decides who is worthy of receiving further care. McEwan's analogue between neurosurgery and creative writing consolidates this pastoral power of Perowne, who changes the course of people's lives as easily as a novelist does. In addition to performing a life-saving surgical intervention for Baxter, he abuses his power for his personal and emotional ends in determining how this genetically *abnormal* intruder should live. This essay aims to understand the novel's exploration of the power of this new pastorate in the era of medicalised politics.

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1 Introduction

Ian McEwan's *Saturday* (2005) has elicited an odd mixture of responses. Certainly, it has been a critical success: while novelist Anita Brookner praised it as 'undoubtedly McEwan's best' for his virtuoso prose (38), Michiko Kakutani added it to the pantheon of post-9/11 classics (41), and Ruth Scurr expressed her admiration for the 'series of vivid tableaux' of 'daily violence' surrounding our sense of happiness (13). Loosely modelled on Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), *Saturday* reconstructs a day in the life of a wealthy middle-aged Londoner, punctuated by flashbacks. Whilst Woolf's text ramifies in multiple directions, McEwan's follows a single trajectory. Woolf moves vertically and horizontally; not only does she dive into Clarissa Dalloway's mind to uncover her unfulfilled homoerotic desire and unspoken reflections on life and dignity, but she also infiltrates the minds of the ensemble cast, ranging from the romantic Peter Walsh to the poor, *ressentiment*-driven Doris Kilman and the shell-shocked Septimus Warren Smith. In contrast, McEwan invariably narrates from the protagonist Henry Perowne's point of view.[1] This self-assured neurosurgeon in McEwan's novel proudly acts as a vital piece of the 'supermachinery' of society, to borrow a word from the novel's epigraph, a quote from Saul Bellow's *Herzog* (1964) (McEwan, *Saturday* n.pag.; Bellow 201). Unlike Clarissa Dalloway and Moses Herzog, he is not marginalised in any way and is only occasionally overwhelmed by post-9/11 anxiety and fear——'a mess, a stew of many ingredients, of foreboding and preoccupation' (McEwan, *Saturday* 39). Though apparently innocuous, the following comment by Kakutani has a significant implication: *Saturday* fulfils 'the very primal mission of the novel: to show how we——*a privileged few of us, anyway*——live' (41; emphasis added). *Saturday* is definitely a finely wrought study of 'a privileged few of us'.

Its limited scope, however, has invited substantial criticism, which Tom Dancer called 'scholarly vilification' (204), implying that all critical voices are merely slanders. The first fierce criticism allegedly came from Irish novelist John Banville, who flatly dismissed *Saturday* as a

1) His choice not to follow Woolf's path may have been deliberate, considering his growing distaste for experimental writing——or at least ambivalence towards modernism——and interest in the 'traditions of the English novel, the treasures that are laid up for us by the great 19th-century expositors of character and psychology' (McEwan et al., 'The State of Fiction' 51; Lynn 154; McEwan et al., 'On Writing'; James 181–82).

'dismayingly bad', 'self-satisfying' novel, replete with 'the feel of a neoliberal polemic gone badly wrong' (14). Placing the novel alongside post-9/11 fiction like Kakutani, Peter Morey criticised it for giving no 'alternative' to Perowne's worldview (45), according to which most black males and Middle Easterners are drug dealers——except for his professionally successful friends who believe in Western values——and cultural relativists are morally bankrupt (47–48). Notwithstanding Dancer's allegations, these critics are aware of multiple ironies in McEwan's text. No reader could possibly miss the distance the author keeps from his unabashedly philistine neurosurgeon who regards Henry James as a 'fuzzy' and exasperatingly circumlocutory writer, *Anna Karenina* (1877) and *Madame Bovary* (1856) as moral lessons about adultery with a cornucopia of period details, and magic realism as infantile escapism (McEwan, *Saturday* 58, 66–68). These critics simply argue that such ironies alone are not sufficient to counterbalance Perowne's complacency (Wallace 473) or to help the reader interrogate the unfair world order (Morey 48). The novel's finale has been considered problematic, too. Baxter, a violent underclass man with Huntington's disease who breaks in on him at his home——whom Perowne initially perceives as subhuman and whose 'degeneracy' overlaps Islamism in his imagination (Morton 23)——is miraculously *tamed* by Matthew Arnold's 'Dover Beach' (1867) and then *fixed* by a neurosurgical intervention, as if to signal the triumph of high culture and advanced medicine that belong to the elite minority of society (Wells, *Ian McEwan* 121). This can be construed as an atavistic return to the Victorian 'fantasy of liberalism' (Hadley 93), a symptom of 'postcolonial melancholia' (Wallace 479) or the atrophy of liberal humanist imagination that used to be the hallmark of the 'Condition of England' novel (Ross 93).

Almost two decades after the novel's publication, Perowne's complacency looks more relevant to the growing power of medical and biotech experts. As with any topical fiction, Perowne's political stance and post-9/11 fear seem rather dated. As Saddam Hussein's possession of weapons of mass destruction turned out to be a falsehood, a majority of British people found it wrong to have sent their troops to Iraq (Dahlgreen 2015). The war apparently created more problems than it solved. Many have begun to suspect that there must have been better options than to invade and occupy the country, turning many innocent citizens into the victims of sectarian violence. After the rise and fall of ISIS, the self-styled 'caliphate', not many people fear——at least not as acutely as Perowne does——that aeroplanes might be hijacked by Islamic terrorists at any time, or that their privilege might be imperilled by the sudden intrusion

of irrational violence. No educated person, except a staunch Islamophobe, believes that the possession of a copy of the Qur'an indicates a person's fanaticism. However, in the 2020s, and especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become easier to locate another source of our vague uncomfortableness with Perowne's complacency. It is the novel's reminder that medical professionals like him have what Michel Foucault called 'pastoral power'. By definition, pastoral power refers to the power of the shepherd/priest to guide sheep/people, *omnes et singulatim* (all and each), in the right direction and to maximise the welfare of whoever falls under their jurisdiction, implicitly determining what their life and well-being should be like (Foucault 128–29, 169–70). According to Nikolas Rose, this power is not wielded by the state, but collectively by doctors, medical associations, ethical advisory boards, healthcare bureaucrats and biotech companies, among others——often on the basis of informed consent (73). As a diligent neurosurgeon, Perowne provides care for *all and each* patient, whoever they are, as long as they are under his care. By removing tumours and other *abnormalities* or rerouting nerves, he leads them to live *normally* and thereby decides what a *normal* life should be like. Besides, his diagnosis determines who is eligible for further medical care and how they are legally allowed to live. Despite his imperfection, he fills the role of this new pastorate, using science to put everything——including his own feelings——in the right order.

This essay, then, seeks to comprehend the ways McEwan connects his observation of this new pastoral power with his expressed interest in the ethical dimensions of literature. Despite his sheer ignorance of literature, Perowne does his job in a way reminiscent of a novelist. When novelist Zadie Smith pointed this out, McEwan gladly explained the parallel he made between Perowne's neurosurgery and creative writing (Smith 121–22). This analogy also reminds us that this neurosurgeon is an *author* of other lives in that he can change people's lives and even bend the rules as easily as a novelist. At one level, he surgically removes haematomas from Baxter's brains, just as he has done and will do with any patient under his care, thereby allowing them to live. At another, he can determine how Baxter should live. Feeling at once guilty for his own complicity in that day's events and sympathetic for Baxter, he decides to persuade the Crown Prosecution Service to drop the charges on medical grounds and leave Baxter to go through the severe symptoms of Huntington's disease in an isolated hospital ward. Just as in *Atonement* Briony Tallis gives Cecilia and Robbie a second, happier life in her novel as her belated act of 'atonement', Perowne chooses to design the young man's life out of such personal motives as his

feelings of guilt and vicarious sympathy. Although apparently altruistic, he toys with real human beings, not fictional characters. While Briony's decision can be read solely in relation to her own personal feelings and ethics, Perowne's necessarily involves a wide range of questions concerning normality, medicalisation of social issues, medical ethics and, more generally, the way 'a privileged few of us' live and affect the underprivileged rest as subjects of the biopolitical state.

2 Neurosurgeon as a Plumber

While occasionally coming close to medical fiction, *Saturday* provides an insider's down-to-earth view of neurosurgery as a kind of 'plumbing' (44, 255) and employs this trope to explore an intricate web of ethical, socio-political questions. Perowne's work at the hospital is comprised of a series of tightly scheduled surgical interventions and procedures done with almost mechanical precision, interspersed with communication and paperwork to ensure accountability and transparency. His work is a product of workmanship, 'technical mastery and concentration' (44) and total 'absorption' (258), not creativity, serendipity or ambitions to develop unconventional, original techniques. He occasionally experiences epiphany, but once he enters operating theatres ── 'the enclosed world of his firm' (11) ── he concentrates on what he is professionally obligated to do. Consequently, he looks more like a highly specialised office worker ── if not really like a plumber ── than a medical gladiator defeating the evil forces of nature with heroic prowess or a wise man miraculously saving mankind with godlike power. Because his contract obliges him and his qualifications allow him, he dutifully, skilfully removes *abnormalities* such as tumours, schwannomas, haematomas and gliomas, reroutes arteries and thereby brings his patients' brains back to *normal*. Although he occasionally suspects that his belief in normality may be invalid outside his operating theatres (141), he comfortably remains in the prison house of his own belief, which affects him in two ways. At times, he is tempted to apply this principle to envisage drastic remedies for what he perceives as the world's threatening *anomalies*, including global jihadist terrorism and Saddam's dictatorship, but not the war on terror, Britain's post-9/11 securitisation, or the continued marginalisation of the underprivileged population. In contrast to this odd temptation, he turns a blind eye to his own power or the social and ethical implications of his diagnosis or recommendations for the ongoing development of biopolitics in Britain.

Perowne's faith in the benefits of normality as a neurosurgeon certainly runs through his imagination. As Laura Colombino argues, he comprehends humans and cities——specifically London——in neurochemical terms (792–93). Watching two nurses in dark coats coming towards Cleveland Street at night, he perceives them as nothing more than 'little biological engines', 'innumerable branching neural networks' merely enclosed by bones, muscles and skin (McEwan, *Saturday* 13) and somehow integrated into the systematic functioning of the city (Colombino 792). As if to confirm this biochemical view, he thinks

> the city is a success, a brilliant intervention, a *biological masterpiece*——millions teeming around the accumulated and layered achievements of the centuries, as though around a coral reef, sleeping, working, entertaining themselves, harmonious for the most part, nearly everyone wanting it to work. And the Perownes' own corner, a triumph of congruent *proportion*; the *perfect* square laid out by Robert Adam enclosing a *perfect* circle of garden ——an eighteenth-century dream bathed and embraced by modernity, by street light from above, and from below by fibre-optic cables, and cool fresh water coursing down pipes, and sewage borne away in an instant of forgetting. (McEwan, *Saturday* 5; emphases added)

By calling London a *biological*——not architectural or urban planning——masterpiece, Perowne perceives humans and their artificial creations as different and yet dynamically connected parts of a life form. While molecularising the night-shift nurses' bodies, he at once embeds humans in the machinery they have created and re-imagines it as an organic extension of their bodies. That chimeric life form should aspire to perfection, at least according to his worldview. His corner of London's wealthy West End is characterised by its proportion and perfection. This perfection forms a striking contrast to the damaged spaces with which he compares Baxter's brain. He not only associates the intruder's skull fracture with 'an earthquake fissure seen from the above, or a crack in a dry riverbed' (251) but also tries to skirt around his sensory strip, which is actually intact, 'like bad neighbourhoods in an American city' (254), instead of a sanctuary or nature reserve. This unfair comparison indicates Perowne's intuitive recognition of Baxter's brain as a danger zone that has already lost normal coordination and collapsed into anarchy, largely due to irreparable damage done by a genetic irregularity. As such, this Huntington's gene carrier's brain encapsulates the worst nightmare for the neurosurgeon, or

'the unruly other whom Perowne must restrain for the sake of general order' (Wells, *Ian McEwan* 117). His fear of unwelcome irregularity is complicated by his repulsion for atavism as implied in Baxter's 'simian' appearance, complete with his 'muzzle'-like mouth (McEwan, *Saturday* 88, 260), and his gang's behavioural pattern 'that also oils the machinations of bullfrogs and cockerels and stags' (87). He is naturally disturbed by the intrusion of what he thinks is irregular or abnormal into his corner of London, perceived as a life form that he is a part of, be it a flaming airliner in the sky (14–15), the presence of young drug addicts (60) or the influx of anti-war protesters (60–61)——so much so that he is even tempted to run to a young female drug addict and give her a prescription for an opioid antagonist (65). All irregularities must be removed so that he can feel reassured by the 'orderliness' or 'the square at its best' (272).

This odd combination of a belief in normality and a molecularising view of the world as an interconnected life form shapes Perowne's political outlook. The word *proportion* in the above quote can be read as a nod to Sir William Bradshaw's preaching of 'proportion' in *Mrs Dalloway*. Woolf's knowledgeable, well-trained and yet grotesquely apathetic doctor firmly believes that the doctors should incarcerate and even sterilise whoever lacks a sense of proportion and that the state should systematically implement such a policy (Woolf 84). His passion, then, lies in what he calls 'conversion', a forcible transformation of whoever he thinks is unfit——whoever lacks a sense of proportion——into whoever he thinks is fit (85), an inhumane approach that finally drives Septimus Warren Smith to suicide. Even though Perowne can be described as insensitive rather than callous, he pursues proportion and conversion in a modest way. He equates socio-political issues, including the Falklands War and 9/11, with a socio-political deviation from what he thinks is the norm——which he describes in physiological terms ('an aberration')——to be eventually treated and cured, and is therefore upset when this assumption seems less reasonable (McEwan, *Saturday* 32). Though only with fluctuating confidence,[2] he tries to defend the social as well as scientific norms established in the West at the risk of making a logical leap

2) Perowne's disguised confidence has been discussed both positively and negatively: while Dancer considers it indicative of the neurosurgeon's 'immodesty' or his blindness to the uncertainties of the world, and McEwan's critique of the hubris behind it (211), Morey dismisses it as a factor contributing to the 'slightly "undercooked"' feel of the book that does not fully subscribe to the post-9/11, Islamophobic political discourse or connect Baxter's intrusion to the resistance of the wretched of the earth against normalised, everyday violence (48–49).

by assuming that just because Western civilisation is responsible for advanced medicine and democracy, it should be immune from any criticism, particularly from the one by cultural relativists or multiculturalists (77). Knowing that post-9/11 anxieties have accelerated 'this narrowing of mental freedom' (180), or his own inability to think beyond the prescribed scenario of the West's rational civilisation versus irrational Islamist terrorism,[3] he almost compulsively imagines his nation engaging in a crusade to bring order to chaos. Despite his scientific mindset, he suspends his rational disbelief in the mediatised scenario in which an impending war would give birth to 'a democracy at last, secular or Islamic' (141). Sensing his daughter Daisy's disapproval, he defends himself rather irrationally. Acknowledging Britain's imperialist misadventures in the Middle East as a 'big mistake', he claims that it 'could be a chance to put that right' (187), reactivating the imperialist conception of Britain as the liberator of Iraq, which can be traced back to Lieutenant General Sir Stanley Maude's 1917 proclamation after the seizure of Basra (Gregory 147).[4] With no evidence, he insists that their military adventures would pave a road to democracy for the Iraqi citizens, just as the British imperialists allegedly did it in relation to the overthrow of the Ottoman rule. He declares, rather haughtily, 'Plant a seed. See if it flourishes and spreads' (McEwan, *Saturday* 192). Of course, the seed did not flourish or spread on Iraqi soil. The sectarian violence that followed, or was ignited by, the US invasion of Iraq exacted more than 200,000 civilian lives (Revkin 2023; Ibrahim 2023). The Iraq War, together with other US-led military interventions in the Arab world conducted 'without any legal grounds', gave an excuse for Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine ('Putin's Declaration of War on Ukraine'). Perowne sounds not only unreasonable but also contradictory, as this particular instance somehow falls outside the jurisdiction of his conservative wisdom according to which '[T] he world must improve, if at all, *by tiny steps*' (McEwan, *Saturday* 74; italics added) ——the one with which he justifies his own aversion to Islamism and the anti-war protest on 15 February 2003. He ends up irritating his daughter by dividing the world into 'pro-war' and 'pro-

3) Wallace also detects that this moment of epiphany——or 'the closest thing the novel offers to an epiphany'——does not catalyse a significant epistemological change in Perowne (472–73).

4) This megalomaniac illusion is certainly a variation of what McEwan once called 'a Churchillian dimension' (Haffenden 44), though his stance is less clear now. He has never justified imperialism, but he openly defends Enlightenment values and the Western tradition of rational thinking around which colonialism was constructed (Smith 124; Lynn 144).

Saddam' (190)——a variation of George W. Bush's address on 20 September 2001, 'Either you're with us or you're with the terrorists'——which makes it impossible to 'hold a position in which one opposes both' (Butler 2). Beneath the thin veneer of Perowne's belief in orderliness in society lies a post-9/11 impulse to 'reinvigorate a fantasy that the world formerly was orderly' (Butler 30), or the distorted vision of the happiness of 'a privileged few of us' built on quotidian violence against the rest of the world as normal. In this context, it is not far-fetched to read the short, apish-looking, unhealthy and violent Baxter with cropped 'dark brown hair' and 'thick eyebrows' (McEwan, *Saturday* 87) as a condensed image of a threatening figure of fear for the complacent white middle class——'the militant poor, the citizens of the developing world, or even an Arab extremist' (Wallace 476) or 'the disadvantaged, especially migrants from impoverished nations' (Wells, 'Moral Dilemmas' 42). Though captured in beautifully crafted prose, Perowne simply reaffirms this post-9/11 imperative that *we* must forcefully remove whatever is perceived as a clog to maintain the normal flow of *our* daily life, to borrow the trope of plumbing.

While Perowne's tacit approval of the war only tangentially indicates his reverence for sovereign power, he does engage more directly in his version of Bradshavian 'conversion'. For Perowne, Baxter is not a fellow human being, but an undesirable effect of a genetic mutation and a threat to society's well-being that must be physically removed. After providing surgical interventions for him, Perowne feels a conviction——that the charges must be dropped——deepening while checking the injured criminal's pulse (McEwan, *Saturday* 278). To achieve this end, he chooses to abuse his power to pathologise him in a way that would bestow upon medical experts, not the state or police, the right to decide how he should live. He does not even try to consult legal or ethical experts, let alone the injured criminal himself or his family. While thinking to himself, Perowne is fully aware of the immense power that he possesses as a medical expert, a power even greater than that of law enforcement:

> Baxter has a diminishing slice of life worth living, before his descent into nightmare hallucination begins. Henry can get a colleague or two, specialists in the field, to convince the Crown Prosecution Service that by the time it comes round, Baxter will not be fit to stand trial. This may or may not be true. Then the system, the right hospital, must draw him in securely before he does more harm. Henry can make these arrangements, do what he can to make the patient comfortable, somehow . . . By saving his life in the operation

> theatre, Henry also committed Baxter to his torture. Revenge enough. And here is one area where Henry can exercise authority and shape events. (278; ellipsis added)

Significantly, neither police, court nor Baxter himself can overturn Perowne's clinical judgement, or his decision on how this young man should live or what kind of life is 'worth living'. Despite his apparently benevolent posture, Perowne deems a life with manageable symptoms to be 'worth living', contrasting it with a life affected by severe cognitive impairments and mental disorders ('nightmare hallucination'). By not letting Baxter die and not putting him on trial, he fashions himself the new identity as a powerful pastor who can confer a short period of life 'worth living', safely sequestered within the walls of a hospital ward, away from the rest of the world. Like a Foucauldian pastor, he 'keeps watch'——or more precisely, lets his fellow medical professionals '[keep] an eye out for possible evils' as well as 'possible misfortune' (Foucault 127). Just because Perowne personally considers it appropriate ('Revenge enough'), he sentences Baxter to live as the neurosurgeon wants him to: locked inside a hospital room, unable to defend himself in court or make an informed decision on his own life or treatment. Perowne's powerfulness highlights Baxter's powerlessness: while the tall, rich, healthy, squash-playing neurosurgeon can design someone else's life as he wishes, this little man does not have any agency even over his own life. As if to distract our attention from Perowne's decision to subjugate and disempower him, McEwan links Baxter's lack of agency to his trinucleotide repeat expansion.[5] As Baxter is conveniently uneducated and unlikeable, McEwan can easily bypass the ethical debate on the rights and responsibilities of patients with Huntington's disease, an issue that has gained recognition with the rise of online discussion groups of insiders (Rose 125–29). Rather, he mobilises the horror of being attacked by a violent man prone to delusion. With the absence of genetic experts who Perowne believes will reach the truth about life at a molecular level, his 'plumbing'——his neurosurgical interventions, complete with medical advice and arrangements——is one of the most effective ways to bring about orderliness.

While navigating his professional responsibilities and personal beliefs, Perowne enthusiastically serves as an agent of order and normality, or more precisely, what he——as

5) Although Perowne is not always McEwan's mouthpiece, he doubts that individual efforts can outwit genetic determinism (25) or that 'social justice' will ever heal the poor and disenfranchised population (272).

well as many like-minded members of the affluent class——thinks is order and normality. As with the case of Sir William Bradshaw in Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, he easily applies his adherence to order and proportion to society, or more precisely, to post-9/11 world politics. By regarding his profession as a kind of 'plumbing', he not only circumvents ethical questions regarding patient autonomy but also distracts his own attention from the almost unbridled power he wields over the lives of others every day. While Woolf portrays that elite doctor as the most obnoxious, predatory minor character in the novel, McEwan chooses not to turn a critical eye, at least on the textual surface, to this vulgarian neurosurgeon's power and the current biopolitical order in which we willingly license medical experts to regulate and reformulate our lives.

3 Neurosurgeon as a Writer

While ostensibly uncritical of the biopolitical power of this new pastorate, *Saturday* explores the issue in relation to authorship by employing the trope of art or creative writing. At first glance, this analogy seems almost maliciously inappropriate for Perowne, whose understanding of *Madame Bovary* and *Anna Karenina* is far below that of precocious teenagers. Tony Blair's misrecognition of the neurosurgeon as a painter at the opening party for the Tate Modern certainly constitutes another variation on the theme of a sudden intrusion of fear into everyday life, this time on the part of the prime minister——a '[stab] of cold panicky doubt' (McEwan, *Saturday* 144)——and yet does not seem to say anything about Perowne. However, this misrecognition is not as innocuous as it seems, when his surgical interventions are compared to creative writing or, more generally, artistic creation. This parallel illuminates an aspect of the biopolitical power of the medical pastorate. Under the pretence of fixing defects with textbook precision, like 'plumbing', Perowne can and actually does refashion someone else's life as easily and radically as a novelist designs their characters' lives. Just as a novelist often bends the existing rules and theories, the neurosurgeon forsakes the principles of evidence-based medicine in favour of his own personal agendas. Despite his lack of extensive or rewarding reading experience, let alone a writing experience, he is inching towards the novelist's party without knowing it.

Despite obvious differences, Perowne's 'plumbing' certainly resembles some kind of creative work. Unlike works of art, the end products of his work——medicalised human bodies——are, no matter how their bodies with the dura mater beautifully sewn up and the titanium plates

bolted to the skull look like man-made artefacts, individual human beings. He only wishes to restore order and normality. However, his peculiar experience of neurosurgery comes close to that of creating something——doing it for pleasure, not out of physiological necessity. Having successfully performed surgery on Baxter and finished the paperwork, he briefly ruminates about the odd state he is in and the pleasure it brings him:

> For the past two hours he's been in a dream of absorption that has dissolved all sense of time, and all awareness of the other parts of his life. Even his awareness of his own existence has vanished. He's been delivered into a pure present, free of the weight of the past or any anxieties about the future. In retrospect, though never at the time, it feels like profound happiness… This benevolent dissociation seems to require difficulty, prolonged demands on concentration and skills, pressure, problems to be solved, even danger. He feels calm, and spacious, fully qualified to exist. It's a feeling of clarified emptiness, of deep, muted joy. (258; ellipsis added)

As McEwan disclosed to Zadie Smith, the paragraph quoted above is really 'about writing, about making art' (Smith 122). To borrow Smith's phrase, it recounts how 'writing as work' is done (122), not how a novelist-hero thinks or dines with friends. 'Work' is apt here because McEwan's emphasis on the strenuous application of both physical and mental capabilities evokes Hannah Arendt's definition of 'work' as the exertion of human strength to ward off the tremendous powers of nature (Arendt 140). Perowne detects nature's abnormalities, uses man-made objects, coordinates his bodily movements, and brings about orderliness by solving these problems, perfectly *dissociated* from the biological cycle. In this regard, he is, like Arendt's *homo faber*, 'the master of all nature' and 'master of himself and his doings' (Arendt 144). As artists as *homines fabrī* transfigure nature by giving a tangible form to their thought (168–69), he puts his belief in order and proportion, in a life worth living, into material shape. He is not even propelled by necessity, physiological, professional or otherwise, as are labourers as *animālia labōrantia*. Rather, he is motivated by the feeling of 'joy' he experiences at the end of his work, the joy of triumph over nature and the achievement of an end, like artists as *homines fabrī*.

As a peculiar kind of creative author, Perowne not only acts out of love of work but also out of the feeling of guilt. When he finally decides to utilise his power as a new pastor of the era of

medicalised biopolitics——persuading everyone into dropping Baxter's charges and locking him up in a hospital ward——he experiences a strange cocktail of feelings. At that moment, he senses a flicker of guilt crossing his mind at least twice:

> Is this forgiveness? Probably not, he doesn't know. And he's not the one to be granting it anyway. Or is he the one seeking forgiveness? He's responsible, after all; twenty hours ago he drove across a road officially closed to traffic, and set in train a sequence of events. Or could it be weakness——after a certain age, when the remaining years first take on their finite aspect, and you begin to feel for yourself the first chill, you watch a dying man with a closer, more brotherly interest. But he prefers to believe that it's realism: they'll all be diminished by whipping a man on his way to hell. (McEwan, *Saturday* 278)

First, he is painfully conscious of his active involvement in the series of incidents leading up to Baxter's doomed break-in and culminating with Perowne's surgery. He does cross Tottenham Court Road in violation of the temporary traffic restrictions to University Street and then turns right, only to hit Baxter's car. Driven by his '*false sense of superiority*', he abuses his medical knowledge to expose 'his secret shame' by saying, 'Your father had it. Now you've got it too' (91, 94). Even if he is not responsible for Baxter's crime and does not have to seek his forgiveness, Perowne could have certainly averted the disaster. Second, he tries not to feel guilty for inflicting further, unnecessary injury on Baxter or accelerating his dreadful fate, a fate 'written in code, at the level of molecules' (272). If he ever seeks 'forgiveness', it is not from Baxter, but from himself, as he is the one who can reduce the 'miseries' of those genetically doomed to live a squalid life (272).[6] His attempt to alleviate his sense of guilt, in this respect, resonates with Briony Tallis' effort in *Atonement* (2001). In that novel, Briony falsely accuses Robbie Turner, a servant's son who is in love with her sister Cecilia——and with whom Briony has been childishly infatuated——of raping her cousin Lola. Knowing that both Cecilia and Robbie die before they reunite, she writes a novel that provides a happy ending for the couple, now married. As they are both dead, she does not——and cannot——seek forgiveness from

6) Emily Horton correctly detects Perowne's feeling of guilt, though she attributes it to his recognition of 'unfairness' and 'injustice' (146).

either of them. Rather, she chooses to ease the burden of guilt by giving a narrative form to her thoughts about what she might have done to carry out her moral responsibility, and how she could have deflected the courses of their lives. As Briony rewrites Cecilia's and Robbie's lives, Perowne bends the course of Baxter's life —— in his case, in reality, not in fiction —— to mitigate his feelings of guilt. Whether they would have wished to live that way does not really matter to Briony or Perowne.[7)]

As with novelists of sensibility, Perowne's sympathy remains safely within the normative bounds of the socio-cultural discourse of sensibility. As if to follow in the footsteps of Victorian authors including Charles Darwin, Perowne's favourite,[8)] who believed that 'we civilised men' sympathise with the weak and 'do our utmost' for their well-being (Darwin 159), the neurosurgeon is determined to do his utmost to perform civilised men's duty —— to allow Baxter to live a life *worth living*, or to retain his intellectual 'hunger' and thereby reclaim his 'mental existence', as testified by his ability to be moved by Arnold's poem, as long as possible (McEwan, *Saturday* 279). While this virtue of sympathy may sound out of place to some in this ostensibly scientifically grounded novel (Holland 165), it is precisely the discourse of sympathy, now christened 'empathy', as the basis of ethics that McEwan has sought to resuscitate since 9/11 (McEwan, 'Only Love and Then Oblivion'). Closely looked at, Perowne's sympathy with Baxter finds root, not in Judeo-Christian altruism, but in his compassion for his own mother Lily, who suffers from Alzheimer's disease. He is, as he believes all humans should be, 'selective in [his] mercies' (McEwan, *Saturday* 127), showing a condescending attitude towards 'the unlucky' (72), until he visits his mother in the west of London. Arguably the most touching episode of this novel occurs when he provides filial care for Lily. He patiently listens to her incoherent utterances, maintains a 'friendly conversation', occasionally supports her delusion, and tries not to offend or frighten her (163–64). He even laughs loudly to stop her from becoming 'too agitated by the story she's telling' (165). Although he cannot guess how Emma Bovary must be feeling,

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7) However, Briony is much more conscious of her limitations and hypocrisy. Towards the end of *Atonement*, she asks herself if a novelist can ever 'achieve atonement when, with her absolute power of deciding outcomes, she is also God' (371).

8) However, Perowne's view of Darwin is not really fair. Although he compares his inability to appreciate novels to Darwin's remark that he 'found Shakespeare dull' (McEwan, *Saturday* 58), Darwin remained an avid reader of novels as Jim Endersby (2009) points out.

he can perfectly empathise with his mother with Alzheimer's disease. His memory of Lily actually returns later when he thinks about Baxter and those born with *undesirable* genes (272–73). When he decides to give Baxter a chance to live 'a diminishing slice of life worth living', he tries, quite vicariously, to do what he could have done for his mother for 'the unlucky', a category to which both she and Baxter belong. Cutting out a tiny piece of the genuine sympathy he has saved for Lily, he gives it to him with an apparently charitable spirit, without blurring the affective boundary between us and them, his family and underclass criminals, the happy few and the 'unlucky' rest.

Saturday reflects and refracts the biopolitical power —— and the role that Perowne plays in it as a neurosurgeon —— through the prism of creative writing as work. Though seemingly inappropriate, this analogy between surgical intervention, as well as medical advice and treatment, and artistic creation reveals the transformative nature of this new pastoral power. Perowne, akin to a novelist like Briony in *Atonement*, shapes the lives of others while embracing private motives and feelings. As his sympathy with Baxter is entrenched in his tender feelings for his mother, now suffering from Alzheimer's disease, his moral sympathy never really extends to whoever he thinks does not belong to his class, 'lucky' people with *desirable* genes. Of course, it would be morally questionable to blame him for withdrawing the case just because of his sentimental motives. However, his decision brings us to a chilling realisation of how easily medical professionals, though well-meaning in most cases, can reject evidence-based approaches and refashion our lives for personal reasons, just like novelists.

4 Conclusion

Perowne's smugness, as well as our discomfort with it, does not solely arise from the privileged status of the wealthy, able-bodied, white middle-class, heterosexual male in post-9/11 Britain. It is also a consequence of the enormous power he exercises as a medical professional over the population under his charge (*omnes*) every day and Baxter (*singulatim*) on this Saturday without knowing it. His belief in normality and proportion as a neurosurgeon oddly extends to his political outlook and general attitude towards social issues, such as the Iraq War, multiculturalism and poverty. As a 'shepherd' of medical and societal order, he abuses his power to determine Baxter's fate just as easily as a novelist changes his or her storyline and plot. This odd connection between Perowne's unimaginative work of neurosurgery —— 'plumbing' —— and

authorship of the lives of others refers us back to Briony's inauspicious attempt to achieve atonement by rewriting Robbie's and Cecilia's lives in her novel. Both Briony and Perowne do their own rewriting task out of personal feelings, not for professional reasons. While it is irrelevant to accuse the former of working out of personal motivation——after all, she, as a novelist, can write about whatever she likes——the latter is supposed to observe evidence-based principles and respect patient autonomy. Perowne casually disregards both and reshapes Baxter's life to assuage pangs of sympathy for his mother.

In this regard, *Saturday* does not simply depict the post-9/11 condition of England as it is alleged, but it also addresses the odd intersection between the ongoing molecularisation of life in the current state of biopolitics and the renewed emphasis on personal moral sentiments, particularly empathy. This dyad looks both new and oddly anachronistic, as if the novel's juxtaposition of medical procedures, anatomical details and genetics were a mere deceptive façade. If Perowne's belief in proportion is almost quasi-religious, Alzheimer's disease and Huntington's disease——or all genetic conditions——stand in for fate. Indeed, when all our temperaments, psychological inclinations and behaviour are explained by genes and chemical reactions, one man's violence is, once again, banished to the realm of fatalism. Divine providence is effectively replaced by selfish genes. Utilising neuroscience, medicine and genetic science to produce the effect of reality, the novelist can pursue 'a paradoxically grounded metaphysics based on rationalism tempered with empathy' (Holland 172). What we witness here is actually a pastor watching over and guiding stray sheep, now equipped with bipolar forceps, micro dissectors, MRI, medical charts and relevant documents. Just as priests do not always act purely on religious impulses, this new type of pastor wields even greater powers to change our lives and deprive us of agency at the whim of his moral sentiments. Behind our uncomfortableness with Perowne lies our burgeoning sense of this new world, governed by this apparently scientifically minded, evidence-based and yet unabashedly emotional pastorate.

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